United Nations ST/IC/2015/12

Secretariat

20 May 2015

Information circular*

To: Members of the staff at Headquarters

From: The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management

Subject: **Language and communications programme at Headquarters — 2015**

1. Language courses in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish are organized to promote linguistic balance and multilingualism within the Secretariat and to improve the language capabilities of staff as mandated by the General Assembly in its resolutions 2480 B (XXIII), 43/224 D and 50/11. The courses provide the opportunity to learn the official languages of the Organization. For further career development, communication skills training provides hands-on practice for enhancing work-related writing and presentation skills.

2. The present information circular includes information on registration procedures, course offerings and the official policies of the United Nations Language and Communications Programme at Headquarters.

I. Course calendar for 2015

3. The Language and Communications Programme offers three terms per year, and all course registration is done in Inspira (https://inspira.un.org), as explained in the language learning section of the human resources portal (https://hr.un.org/page/language-learning). The remaining relevant dates for 2015 are as follows:

2015 spring term (12-week term)

Language classes:	20 April-10 July 2015
End-of-term examinations:	13-16 July 2015

* Expiration date of the present information circular: 31 December 2015.

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2015 fall term (9-week term)

First day of registration for placement tests:	10 July 2015
Registration for courses:	20 July-7 October 2015[1]
Last day to drop a course:	18 October 2015[1]
Language classes:	5 October-4 December 2015
End-of-term examinations:	7-11 December 2015

II. Types of language courses

4. Three types of language courses are offered each term: regular, intensive and specialized.

Regular courses

5. Regular courses range from level 1 (beginner) to level 8 or 9 (advanced), depending on the language. The courses focus on all language skills — speaking, listening, writing, reading and interacting — and are aimed at developing both fluency and accuracy.

6. Regular courses meet for a total of two, three or four hours per week for 12 weeks, depending on the language and level. Each lesson may last one, one and a half or two hours and usually takes place two or three times a week. Courses offered may start at the following times:

Before work: 8 or 8.30 a.m.

At lunch hour: 12, 12.30, 1, 1.30 or 2 p.m.

After work: 5, 5.30 or 6 p.m. (6 p.m. during the main part of the General Assembly session)

Intensive and semi-intensive courses

7. Intensive or semi-intensive courses may be offered as an alternative to the regular programme. Intensive or semi-intensive classes may be offered four days a week, usually from 8.10 to 9.45 a.m., and may be offered at any time during the year. This option is available in some languages and at some levels only.

Specialized courses

8. In response to students' interests and needs, the Language and Communications Programme offers specialized courses focused on a particular language skill, task or topic. These courses may meet for only one or two hours per week and may last less than 12 weeks.

9. Specialized courses offered vary by term, and new ones are introduced as student and work needs arise. Examples include courses that focus on calligraphy; conversation practice; understanding media and movies in the language;

[1] For full-term courses (9 or 12 weeks, depending on the term). For shorter courses, the last day to register is the Wednesday of the week when the course starts, and the last day to drop is the Friday of the week of the second lesson.

presentation skills; writing (e.g. correspondence writing, report writing, summary writing, writing for social media); pronunciation; and language proficiency examination preparation.

10. To adapt to staff mobility and flexible working arrangements, some specialized courses are now being offered in several alternative formats:

(a) **Online synchronous learning**. Usually offered through WebEx; participants in these courses all meet for a lesson at a specified time with the instructor(s) of the course;

(b) **Online asynchronous learning**. Participants complete coursework on their own time and schedule, and receive teacher feedback;

(c) **Blended learning**. Participants complete some coursework either in a traditional classroom or through WebEx and some coursework on their own time and schedule using online tools, for which they receive teacher feedback.

III. Registration

Eligibility

11. Internal learners are United Nations staff members at Headquarters with a United Nations grounds pass and an appointment valid until the end of a given course.[2] Using an Inspira account, they may register for language courses, including online options, at no cost, and are responsible only for purchasing any required textbooks or materials and for paying any incomplete attendance fees, if incurred.

12. Secretariat staff at other duty stations are also eligible to enrol in online learning options (see para. 10) at no cost, provided they have an appointment valid until the end of a given course.

13. External learners are all other applicants, including retirees, staff of United Nations funds and programmes, and delegates and staff of permanent missions to the United Nations. They may be eligible to take language courses, either at no cost or for a fee, as long as they have a United Nations grounds pass valid until the end of the course for which they register.[2] Detailed information on eligibility is available in the language learning section of the human resources portal (https://hr.un.org/page/language-learning).

Role of the supervisor

14. Students are encouraged to discuss with their supervisor any plan to take language classes in the programme, and to agree on a learning plan before submitting their registration.

15. Supervisors, taking into account the exigencies of service and requests received from other staff members, are encouraged to consider approving requests.

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[2] Students whose grounds pass expires before the end of a given course must provide a letter from their supervisor or the executive office indicating that it is expected that their contract will be extended at least until the date of the last lesson (or final examination) of the course. The letter must be attached to the registration request in Inspira.

16. Staff members in New York are entitled to a one-hour lunch break, which may be used for in-house training opportunities, for example a 60-minute language class. For lunchtime courses that last more than 60 minutes, it is recommended that:

(a) Supervisors grant additional time to commute from the office to the location of the language class;

(b) Supervisors grant 20 minutes for a quick meal before or after a language class;

(c) Staff members make arrangements, in collaboration with their supervisor, to compensate for time away from the office that is beyond the traditional lunch break.

Registration priorities and deadlines

17. Registration applications are processed on a first-come, first-served basis and according to these priorities:

(a) Continuing students are given priority to register for the following term of a level course, to ensure that they can continue their studies (provided that they submit their registration before the deadlines and provide all required documentation, including payment of fees if applicable);

(b) When the number of applications for a specialized course is higher than the maximum allowed, priority is given to students who have not taken the course during the two previous terms.

18. The number of students admissible to each class is limited. Interested students should therefore register early. Once a course is full, subsequent applicants are placed on a waiting list and admitted as enrolled students drop the course.

19. The registration deadline is always the Wednesday of the first week of a course, regardless of the duration of the course or the day of the week on which the course starts. However, a language coordinator may decide to close registration for a course earlier when the maximum number of students allowed has been reached. Conversely, if the beginning of a course is postponed, the registration deadline for that course may be postponed as well, depending on the number of students already enrolled.

Course schedules

20. Students may search for language course schedules either in Inspira or on the human resources portal, at https://hr.un.org/page/language-learning.

21. To find information and register in Inspira, students must first log in and do one of the following:

(a) Click on Main menu — Self-service — Learning — My learning. On the "My learning" page, they should type the language and the name of the course (if known);

(b) Browse the options by clicking on Browse catalog — Working for the UN — Languages — Language and Communications Programme and choosing the relevant language. They should then click on one of the following: Placement test,

Level courses, or Specialized courses. There may be more than one page of courses; click on Next (top right) to see further options.

22. In Inspira, a detailed description of the course is provided and includes course objectives, prerequisites, name(s) of teacher(s), location, days, hours and number of places available. To find the price of the course (for paying students only), see paragraph 71 below.

23. Any change made in the course details is immediately reflected in Inspira.

Course cancellations

24. A course that does not have the minimum number of students required may be cancelled. In such cases, students are notified by the coordinator of the language, and such course cancellation may happen:

(a) Until the end of the second week of the course for all 12-week courses (except level 1, semi-intensive and intensive courses);

(b) Until the end of the first week of the course for other 12-week courses (level 1, semi-intensive and intensive courses) and for specialized courses whose duration is less than 12 weeks.

Registration procedures

General information

25. Registration and related correspondence for language courses and placement tests at Headquarters must be completed in Inspira. No in-person registration is available.

26. Access to Inspira and the registration process are different for internal and external learners:

(a) Internal learners can log in using their index number;

(b) External learners who are new to the programme must first set up an Inspira account and request access to New York language courses; step-by-step instructions are available from http://hr.un.org/page/language-learning.

27. Students are responsible for reading and following all registration guidelines, rules and policies in the present circular and those found in the human resources portal.

28. Prior to submitting their registration, students should consider their work schedule, status (e.g. internal/external learner, paying/no-fee student) and previous experience with the Language and Communications Programme at Headquarters in the language for which they want to register (e.g. courses already completed, outstanding fees).

29. Students cannot request registration in two sections of the same course (same level and/or content but at different times or days) within the same term.

30. The submission of registration does not guarantee enrolment in a placement test or course. Registration may be delayed or rejected if, for example, the student does not meet course eligibility requirements, course meeting times overlap, or required documents are not attached in Inspira.

Placement tests

31. A student must take a placement test for a language if he or she is:

(a) A non-native speaker who is new to the programme and who has some knowledge of the language. Only beginners may enrol directly in level 1;

(b) A returning student who has not taken a course in that language in the programme for the past two consecutive terms or more.

32. Students who can provide proof of level of proficiency in a language may contact the coordinator of that language to request a written waiver of the requirement to take a placement test, and to receive course recommendations.

33. Placement test results are valid for two terms following the date of placement at a course level. The results of the exams will be available in Inspira (with a link to the results on the "My learning" page), and students shall register for the course level corresponding to their placement results.

34. Students enrolled in a level course who miss or fail their end-of-term examination (or any alternative form of course assessment) cannot request to take a placement test instead. They must reregister in the same level for any of the two subsequent terms.

Maximum number of enrolments per term

35. To ensure the most effective language learning possible, the Language and Communications Programme encourages students to focus on one language at a time.

36. Students may register for:

(a) Up to two 12-week courses per term in up to two languages (e.g. one level course and one specialized course; or two specialized courses); or

(b) Up to three courses per term in up to two languages if at least one of the courses is a short course (i.e. shorter than 12 weeks).

37. Prior authorization from the Head of the Language and Communications Programme is required in order to register within the same term for:

(a) Two level courses within two language programmes; or

(b) More than two 12-week courses (two 6-week courses may be considered equivalent to one 12-week course).

38. Work-related justifications for enrolment in multiple courses will be given priority consideration. Requests for more than one lunchtime course per day require prior approval from both the student's supervisor (with the exception of retirees) and the Head of the Language and Communications Programme. Enrolment in multiple courses scheduled for the same or overlapping times is not possible.

39. Students are encouraged to complete all level courses in one language before taking a level course in another language.

Confirmation of enrolment

40. Owing to priority placement, room availability and required last-minute changes, some enrolments can be confirmed only at the end of the week preceding the beginning of a term or course.

41. When a course registration request is confirmed, the student will receive an e-mail indicating that he or she is now enrolled and providing all course details. Only students who receive such e-mails are considered registered for a course. It is therefore critical that students maintain accurate and up-to-date contact information in Inspira.

42. Students who attend classes without having been successfully registered through Inspira are in violation of the Secretary-General's bulletin entitled "Status, basic rights and duties of United Nations staff members" (ST/SGB/2002/13). They should contact the Language and Communications Office at languages@un.org, or the coordinator concerned, if they are not on the attendance list for the class that they wish to attend.

43. When a course is cancelled, enrolled students are notified by the appropriate language coordinator. The students may enrol in another similar course, and the previous registration will be transferred accordingly.

Late arrival

44. Enrolled students who are unable to attend the first few days of class are advised to cancel their course registration as soon as possible, so that other students may attend courses from the first day.

45. Students may inform their teacher or the appropriate language coordinator of their late arrival and, to have the option of remaining in the course, must do so in accordance with the following timeline:

(a) By the end of the first week of:

(i) A level 1 course;

(ii) An intensive or semi-intensive course;

(iii) A specialized course whose duration is less than 12 weeks;

(b) During the second week of the course for all other 12-week courses not listed in subparagraph (a) above.

46. The teacher or the appropriate language coordinator may reserve the right to refuse to allow a student to begin attending a course late, and may inform that student that his or her enrolment is cancelled.

47. Even if the student informs the teacher or the appropriate language coordinator of his or her late arrival and is not dropped from the course, he or she will be considered absent for all the classes missed.

Cancellation or change of enrolment by the student

48. If a student cannot — or chooses not to — continue with a course, he or she must drop his or her course in Inspira (on the "My learning" page) before the deadline for dropping the course.

49. To avoid paying a penalty fee, students are advised to cancel their registration:

(a) Before the end of the first week of:

(i) A level 1 course;

(ii) A semi-intensive or intensive course;

(iii) A specialized course whose duration is less than 12 weeks;

(b) Before the end of the second week of:

(i) A level 2 to 9 course;

(ii) A 12-week specialized course.

50. Since students are responsible for their own registration, the opportunities to change a course or level after enrolment are very limited. Students must first contact the appropriate language coordinator by e-mail and provide a work-related or medical reason for the change of course or level.

51. If approved, changes in registration can be made only by the language administrators:

(a) Before the end of the first week of a level 1 course, a semi-intensive or intensive course or a specialized course whose duration is less than 12 weeks;

(b) Before the end of the second week for other courses.

52. Any change of course or level is final.

Students added to a course from the waiting list

53. A waitlisted student can be added to the class list after an enrolled student is removed from it.

54. It is advised that the waitlisted student regularly check the "My learning" page in Inspira to check if the status for the course has changed from "waitlisted" to "enrolled".

55. If a student's status has changed to "enrolled":

(a) It is the student's responsibility to catch up on the course content and assignments (if this seems too difficult or the student's work schedule has since changed, he or she may drop the course);

(b) The teacher will mark the student "present" for the days not attended while he or she was still on the waiting list (and thus did not appear on the teacher's class list during that time), since such absences are not to be considered in the determination of any penalties for low attendance.

Attendance and punctuality

56. The punctuality of teachers and students is an important part of the learning programme and demonstrates students' and teachers' respect for one another. Therefore:

(a) Students are responsible for attending and actively participating in language classes in which they are enrolled. They are expected to attend class on a regular basis and to complete the course assignments;

(b) Students are expected to be present throughout the class, including the first 15 to 20 minutes, when lesson content is introduced; and the last 15 to 20 minutes, when lesson content is summarized and homework provided.

57. In all cases, students are requested to inform their teacher in advance if they will need to arrive to a lesson late, leave a lesson early or be absent from a lesson. The teacher may provide the opportunity for a student to make up the work missed; however, especially when a student has not given any prior notice, the teacher is under no obligation to do so.

58. Penalty fees may apply to students who fail a course if they have low attendance. See the section on absenteeism and penalty fees below for more details.

Absenteeism and penalty fees

59. Staff and affiliated diplomats who enrol in courses and do not attend at all ("no show") or do not attend a minimum number of lessons (incomplete attendance) will be charged a fee of $125 when they try to register for a course in one of the two following terms (see paras. 76-78 below on how to pay fees). This scheme is designed to encourage staff to take enrolment seriously. Instances of "no shows" and incomplete attendance have financial ramifications on the programme and must therefore be kept to a minimum.

60. Students may be charged both an incomplete attendance fee and a no-show fee for two separate courses per term.

No-show fee

61. The no-show fee is payable for all types of courses (regular, intensive or specialized) when a learner wishes to register for a course but was enrolled in a course in one or both of the two previous terms and:

(a) Did not attend any lesson in that course;

(b) Did not cancel his or her registration in due time through the "My learning" page in Inspira;

(c) Did not, before or within the first week of classes (regardless of when the course started in the term), inform his or her teacher or the appropriate language coordinator by e-mail of planned absence during that period.

62. The no-show fee is charged only once per student per term, even if it may apply to more than one course in which the student was enrolled.

63. The no-show fee is $125 (see paras. 76-78 below on how to pay fees).

Incomplete attendance fee

64. The incomplete attendance fee is payable for all types of courses (regular, intensive or specialized) when a learner wishes to register for a course but was enrolled in a course in one or both of the two previous terms and:

(a) Attended less than 75 per cent of the classes for that course (or less than 65 per cent if it was a specialized course) and, in the case of regular and intensive courses, also failed the end-of-term examination (if a student has low attendance but

passes the examination or assessment for the course(s), he or she does not have to pay the fee);

(b) Did not take the end-of-term examination, even if he or she had good attendance and informed the teacher or coordinator in advance.

65. The incomplete attendance fee is charged only once per student per term, even if it may apply to more than one course.

66. The incomplete attendance fee is $125 (see paras. 76-78 below on how to pay fees).

Penalty fee waiver

67. Both the no-show fee and the incomplete attendance fee are automatically waived if students leave a gap of two terms before returning to the language programme (in that case, students will be required to take a placement test).

68. Students who owe an incomplete attendance fee and wish to register in one of the next two terms can request a waiver if they provide any of the following:

(a) A sick leave certificate;

(b) A copy of a mission assignment of which they were not aware at the time of registration (certification from the supervisor may be required);

(c) An official letter or e-mail from a supervisor (clearly indicating the supervisor's title and contact information; notes verbales are not accepted) explaining that the student had a change in work assignments that interfered with his or her ability to attend class.

69. All waiver requests for all courses within the same term to which they may apply must cover the entire period of absence in the case of consecutive absences (on mission, sick leave, etc.), or provide a detailed explanation in the case of several non-consecutive absences (change in work assignments, sick leave, etc.) or written justification, for example for medical or work-related reasons.

70. Students must attach to their registration request in Inspira any related documents that may justify a waiver. To do this, they should click on "Add attachment", select "Waiver request ..." and type that in the description box when they upload the document. Any waiver request submitted in person or sent by e-mail will not be accepted.

Paying students

71. Fees for each course are based on the number of lesson hours, as follows:

72 hours (e.g. 6 hours per week for 12 weeks), $600

60 hours (e.g. 5 hours per week for 12 weeks), $550

48 hours (e.g. 4 hours per week for 12 weeks), $500

36 hours (e.g. 3 hours per week for 12 weeks), $450

30 hours (e.g. 2.5 hours per week for 12 weeks), $400

24 hours (e.g. 2 hours per week for 12 weeks), $300

16-18 hours (e.g. 1.5 hours per week for 12 weeks), $200

12 hours (e.g. 1 hour per week for 12 weeks), $150

6-8 hours (e.g. 1 hour per week for 6 weeks), $100

72. United Nations official holidays and closures due to inclement weather may affect the total number of hours of some courses. All efforts will be made to replace any hours lost, but, in some cases, that may not be possible, and no refund will be given.

73. Unless students have a credit balance from one of the two previous terms, proof of payment must be submitted with the registration request in Inspira. Students will not be able to register without providing proof of payment.

74. Payments due at the time of registration may include new fees for courses in the forthcoming term and outstanding fees due from any previous terms.

75. Paying students are not subject to penalty fees, as they are required to pay full tuition upon registration. They must pay in full to repeat a course, regardless of their attendance. Neither a refund nor credit for future terms will be issued.

How to pay

76. All payments for a course (for paying students) or for a fee (for those who owe one) need to be made at the Cashier's Office, located on the 20th floor of the Secretariat Building. That office is open between 10 a.m. and 3.30 p.m., Monday to Friday.

77. Payment must be made in the form of cash or cheque (payable to the United Nations). Credit cards are not accepted, in accordance with Cashier's Office policy.

78. Students should note that payment is for the Language and Communications Programme. Students receive proof of payment, which they must upload to their registration request in Inspira.

IV. Communication skills training

79. Communication skills training is aimed at improving work-related writing and presentation skills in the working languages of the Organization, namely English and French. This responds to the recommendations of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the strategy for managing the Organization's human resources and other human resources management issues (see A/59/263).

80. Descriptions of the courses are provided on the human resources portal, at http://hr.un.org/page/language-learning.

Eligibility

81. To participate in communication skills training, students must have a high level of proficiency in the relevant language and have work duties that allow them to immediately apply what they are learning. For example, in order to participate in a course on the principles of report writing, one must currently write United Nations reports.

Scheduling

82. Writing courses may include a blend of group lessons and individual tutoring sessions with the instructor.

83. Communication skills training may take place outside the schedule for regular courses.

Department-requested training

84. Departments of the United Nations Secretariat with staff who perform writing or speaking tasks may request tailor-made courses for their specific needs. For example, such courses may address specific considerations for specialized fields (such as economics, accounting, security, peacekeeping, international law or human rights) that differ from those of other United Nations staff owing to specific guidelines, templates or other considerations. Further information can be obtained by contacting the coordinator of the relevant language programme.

V. Additional information

Course materials

85. Course participants are responsible for purchasing any textbooks or other course materials, as instructed by the teacher or coordinator during the first week of the term. Required textbooks may be available for purchase under special arrangements with vendors or in the United Nations Bookshop, located in the basement of the General Assembly Building.

Assessment of learning

Regular, semi-intensive and intensive courses

86. Assessment is an integral and mandatory part of the regular, semi-intensive and intensive courses of the Language and Communications Programme. Students who do not take the form of assessment required to validate their level in a given course, even if they come to class on a regular basis within the term, will be subject to an incomplete attendance fee if they register for any language course in one of the two following terms.

87. However, students may submit in advance an adequate written explanation to the appropriate coordinator if they are unable to take the assessment. The coordinator will then determine whether the work-related or unexpected reasons provided justify a make-up assessment or examination.

88. The dates and venues for the exams are provided at least two weeks in advance. End-of-term examinations are given after the last week of classes for regular, semi-intensive and intensive courses. On the date of the examination or course assessment, students are advised to come at least 10 to 15 minutes earlier than the appointed time. No extra time will be given to latecomers at the end of the scheduled examination period.

89. In order to advance to the next level in a language, students must pass both the written and oral components of the end-of-term examination (for which the minimum passing score is 65 points out of 100) or a continuous evaluation, if

offered. Participants who fail the examination may arrange to have a general discussion of the results by making an appointment with the appropriate language coordinator no later than two weeks after the end of the term.

90. Students who choose to repeat a level without taking the final examination or an alternative form of assessment will be subject to an incomplete attendance fee if their attendance was less than the minimum of 75 per cent of the lessons.

91. Students who pass a level but choose to repeat it should inform their teacher or the appropriate coordinator accordingly at the end of the course period. Exceptions are granted for re-enrolment at the same level in the subsequent term only. Students will not be asked to take the final examination again and will be able to join the next level the following term without paying an incomplete attendance fee, unless the attendance requirement for the repeated course has not been met.

Specialized courses

92. Specialized courses do not have end-of-term examinations. Teachers may choose to give students grades based on their level of attendance during the term (65 per cent minimum) and on evaluation criteria provided by the teacher at the beginning of the course. Grades for specialized courses, however, will not appear in Inspira.

Score reports

93. The results of course assessments will be posted and will be accessible to students in Inspira. From the "My learning" page, to the right of a course completed, click on "Print" to see course assessments.

Language proficiency examination

94. The United Nations language proficiency examination, administered by the Examinations and Tests Section, is the official test of a staff member's knowledge of a language and may be taken both by participants who have completed the highest level of the Language and Communications Programme regular courses in a language and by staff members who have achieved proficiency by other means. Information on the examination and the application process is available from www.un.org/exam/lpe.

VI. Enquiries

95. For general enquiries and information, students may contact the Language and Communications Programme:

(a) In person, Monday to Friday, at the DC2 Building, room DC2-200, from 1 to 3 p.m.;

(b) By e-mail, to languages@un.org;

(c) By phone, to:

(i) Victoria Ceban (Human Resources Assistant), 212-963-2315; or

(ii) Joseph Vukas (Staff Development Assistant), 917-367-2623.

96. For pedagogical enquiries or to arrange appointments, contact:

Arabic Programme Coordinator: Riadh Bounatirou, 212-963-8535

Chinese Programme Supervisor: Yong Ho, 212-963-2481

English Programme Coordinator: Jodi Nooyen, 212-963-2001

French Programme Coordinator: Pascal Schaller, 212-963-1847

Russian Programme Head Teacher: Anna Dvigubski, 212-963-7063

Spanish Programme Coordinator: Antonio Ramos Alvarez, 212-963-3329

97. For additional enquiries, contact Javier Zanon, Head of the Language and Communications Programme (zanon@un.org).